

# The Making of a State-of-the-Art Facility

Southern Nevada shooters anticipate a world-class, multi-use facility taking shape near Las Vegas

By C. Douglas Nielsen

*Editor's Note: This is the first of what may be several articles tracing the creation of the Clark County Sport Shooting Park. Readers will not only be able to chronicle the formation of a world-class facility, but may also pick up valuable tips along the way that can be adapted to a plan they may have for range development or expansion.*

Perry Dickerson sat in my office at the Nevada Department of Wildlife and vented his frustration. It was the mid 1990s; I was working as the department's regional hunter education coordinator. For more than two decades, Dickerson and some friends had been working to secure land for a public shooting facility in southern Nevada, only to be disappointed time and again. He had hoped that day would be different; it wasn't. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had turned them down again.

More than a million people made their home in the Las Vegas Valley then, but the area still had

no publicly owned shooting facility, a source of growing frustration among recreational shooters who were quickly losing their informal "desert ranges" to development.

Now, nearly 10 years and another 800,000 people later, the situation is finally changing.

Thanks to the tenacious efforts of several local shooters, including State Senator John Lee and Chuck Musser, the Las Vegas Valley will soon have the facility Dickerson could only dream of. Unfortunately, he won't be there to see the gates swing open on what will be a world-class facility — the Clark County Sport Shooting Park. Dickerson passed

away in 2001.

Although Dickerson and others had been advocating the development of a public shooting facility for many years, it wasn't until the late 1990s that the concept finally received the support that pushed it over the top. Spurred by the accidental shooting of an off-duty police officer, the City of Las Vegas acknowledged safety concerns associated with unregulated shooting activities in the surrounding desert areas and began looking for a solution to the problem, explained Sen. Lee, Clark County Sports Shooting Park Advisory Committee chairman.

After taking a closer look at the issue, an ad hoc committee chaired by Musser — then a member of the Las Vegas Parks and Recreation Board — recommended building a public shooting facility on a 2,900-acre site located at the northernmost reaches of the Las Vegas Valley. But land acquisition was an issue, as it always had been. That's when Lee, then a state assemblyman, got involved. Lee shepherded a resolution through Nevada's Legislature that encouraged the state's federal delegation to seek a congressional decree transferring ownership of the selected site from the BLM to Clark County.

Enter Nevada's U.S. Senators

***The urban sprawl of Las Vegas can easily be seen from the future location of the hunter education facility to be built as part of the Clark County Sport Shooting Park and should provide a spectacular nighttime view.***





Harry Reid and John Ensign. They, along with Rep. Jim Gibbons, were successful in obtaining the land through congressional action in November 2002. The Clark County Public Shooting Range Conveyance Act passed by a unanimous vote of the Senate and was signed into law by President George Bush, granting the land to the county at no cost. The law stipulated that the land be used specifically for a public shooting facility.

"This will be a great facility for residents in the Las Vegas Valley who enjoy recreational activities such as hunting and target shooting," said Ensign in a press release issued after the bill passed. "It is important to provide them the proper facilities to pursue their interests and to ensure their safety. Local law enforcement will also benefit by having a place for firearms training."

With the land situation settled, the Board of Commissioners directed the Department of Parks and Community Services to develop the range and oversee its opera-

tion. The board also appointed the Citizen Advisory Committee, now chaired by Lee, to guide the development process while providing input from the perspectives of various user groups. A shooting range built in the world's entertainment capital must be anything but ordinary. Someone with extensive experience and vision to match was needed to round out the team.

Don Turner, then manager of Arizona's highly successful Ben Avery Shooting Facility and a member of the National Association of Shooting Ranges (NASR) executive board, was hired as a consultant. His mission: Design a world-class shooting facility that would take full advantage of the vast 2,900-acre site, draw competitive shooters from around the world, meet the needs of multiple shooting disciplines, provide for law enforcement train-



*Don Turner, project manager for the new Clark County Sports Shooting Park*

ing needs and give southern Nevada's recreational shooters a safe and affordable place to shoot.

Turner did just what he was asked, eventually earning himself the job of project manager for the new shooting park, responsible for bringing the project to completion.

"It's amazing that a city this size has no public shooting ranges," Turner said while providing a tour. "And it's such a natural too, being the entertainment capital of the world with all of the tremendous transportation and other resources. It's just

## Getting Started

In many states, it's long been the local fish and game department that facilitates the development of public shooting facilities both large and small. This holds true in Arizona where Don Turner, now the project manager for the new Clark County Sports Shooting Park, once managed the Ben Avery Shooting Facility as an employee of the Arizona Game & Fish Department.

While filling that role, Turner also served as the program manager for the Arizona Shooting Ranges Project and wrote the guidelines for the development of shooting ranges that fell under the auspices of the Game & Fish Department. Those guidelines were published in the agency's "Workbook for the Development of Arizona Shooting Ranges," and Turner has been following them while putting together southern Nevada's new facility.

"Most problems with the development of new shooting ranges," wrote Turner, "revolve

around a lack of understanding regarding organizational needs, site selection, need/demands, and financial viability."

He then set out to alleviate those problems by outlining five phases of shooting range development: Feasibility Assessment; Feasibility Analysis; Recommendation; Project Planning; and Project Implementation.

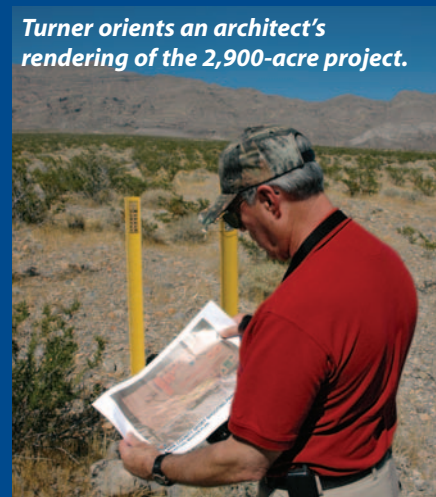
"In order to avoid self-generated fatal flaws, the user must not skip nor ignore any of these phases," noted Turner.

With Turner's advice in mind, anyone contemplating the development of a new shooting facility will want to start with Phase I—the Feasibility Assessment. If done thoroughly and correctly, the Feasibility Assessment will answer the critical questions, says Turner, of: Who is going to build it? Operate it? Manage it? Who is going to use it? What do they want? Will it meet their needs (rifle, pistol, shotgun, air gun, archery, etc.)? Is there enough use to pay for it? Where will it be located? How big

will it be? What services will it provide? Who is going to oppose it and why? Who is going to pay for it? Is it economically viable?

With those questions answered you'll be ready to move on to Phase II, an analysis of the data generated in Phase I.

*Turner orients an architect's rendering of the 2,900-acre project.*



*Informal desert ranges like this are common in southern Nevada but may become a thing of the past once the new Clark County Sport Shooting Park opens its gates in 2007.*



amazing to me this hasn't been done earlier."

The site measures three miles across and 1½ miles deep. During the tour, Turner described the various venues that would one day fill the space. The list includes a hunter education center, an indoor range, public day-use ranges, tactical ranges, rifle and pistol silhouette ranges, a benchrest range, a cowboy mounted shooting arena and a 1,200-yard high-power rifle range. A 35-seat classroom will accompany each range. Shotgun enthusiasts will benefit from 125 trap and 24 skeet ranges as well as sporting clays and international trap facilities. Archers will also find something for them — an International Archery Federation — (FITA) approved archery range and three field courses.

"We are building the range for 20 years into the future, and we're building it to handle a population of four million people. This is going to be a premier facility, and we'll be able to handle any type of shooting event in the United States; but our primary purpose is to serve the citizens of Clark County. So our first phase is to

build the public rifle, pistol, shotgun and archery ranges," said Turner.

Local shooters can expect to pay \$6 a day for shooting privileges.

"You can't even buy popcorn at the movie for that," Turner chuckled.

Turner's goal is to have the facility up and running within the next two years. As of press time, Phase I is still in the permitting and design process. Once those processes and any necessary zoning changes are completed, the county can begin construction. Then, noted Turner, "It's going to be just a matter of time before we're ready to shoot."

## A Timely Funding Source

Don Turner's goal is to build the new Clark County Sport Shooting Park in Las Vegas, Nevada, into the world's foremost shooting venue. To accomplish his designs, the county needs money and lots of it, but rather than raising taxes to pay for the project, Clark County has been able to tap into the funding made available through the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act passed in 1998.



This act permits the Secretary of Interior to authorize the expenditure of funds generated through the sale of public lands. These funds can be used for the development of trails, parks and natural areas within Clark County. The new shooting park falls into this category.

Phase I of the project has already been fully funded, but the county is waiting for approval of the \$42 million dollars required for completion of Phase II. The venues needed most by the citizens of Clark County will be built during the first phase. Those include the hunter education center, an archery range, pistol and rifle ranges and clay target facilities.

More information about the Clark County Sport Shooting can be found on the Internet — [www.accessclarkcounty.com](http://www.accessclarkcounty.com).

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